

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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R 230850Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3786

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 JIDDA 1320

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PDIP, SA

SUBJECT: PRESENTATION OF CREDENTIALS

SUMMARY. PRESENTATION OF CREDENTIALS BY AMBASSADOR WILLIAM J. PORTER TO HIS MAJESTY KING KHALID BIN ABD AL-AZIZ AL SAUD TOOK PLACE IN RIYADH ON FEBRUARY 21, 1976, FOLLOWED BY A CONVERSATION WITH HIS MAJESTY AND PRINCIPAL FIGURES OF THE COURT ON SUBJECTS SUCH AS THE DESERT, THE STARS AND THE MOON, AND THE DETERIORATION OF THE MOON AS A SYMBOL OF LOVE. END SUMMARY.

1. FOLLOWING REPORT PREPARED BY AMBASSADOR BEFORE DEPARTURE FOR U.S.

FEB. 22: QUOTE

BECAUSE OF POSTPONEMENTS OF THE DATE ON WHICH I MIGHT BE RECEIVED BY KING KHALID, I JOURNEYED TO RIYADH BY ROAD, LEAVING JIDDA ON THE MORNING OF TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17. MY PLAN WAS TO OVERNIGHT IN THE DESERT AT SOME POINT EN ROUTE AND TO ARRIVE IN RIYADH DURING THE AFTERNOON OF FEBRUARY 18. I WAS ACCOMPANIED BY ADMINISTRATIVE COUNSELOR OF THE EMBASSY, MR. SWEDENBERG; BY MR. GUTENSOHN, THE REGIONAL SECURITY OFFICER; BY THE TEENAGE SON OF OUR BUDGET AND FISCAL OFFICER, ALLEN JELICH, WHO HAD NEVER SEEN RIYADH AND WHO IS SOON LEAVING SAUDI ARABIA. ALSO THERE WERE FIVE OR SIX SAUDIS AND YEMENIS INCLUDING "LEFTENANT" MESSOUR WHO IS MY SAUDI SECURITY MAN. ALL WENT WELL. WE PASSED OVER THE ESCARPMENT AT TAIF AND EVENTUALLY MADE CAMP ABOUT SIX HUNDRED KILOMETERS EAST OF MECCA WHERE WE PULLED OFF THE ROAD AND FOUND A SUITABLE LEVEL AREA.

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WE DEPARTED FROM THERE AT SEVEN-THIRTY A.M. NEXT DAY,

THE EIGHTEENTH, AND TRAVELED THE REMAINING FIVE HUNDRED KILOMETERS TO RIYADH, ARRIVING ABOUT TWO P.M.

2. IN RIYADH WE LEARNED OF ANOTHER POSTPONEMENT OF THE DATE OF MY PRESENTATION TO THE TWENTY-FIRST, WHICH PROVIDED ME WITH TIME TO MEET SOME FORTY AMERICAN BUSINESSMEN, TO TALK WITH OUR MILITARY MISSION CHIEFS GENERALS AHMANN AND LAWRENCE, AND TO LOOK AT THE CITY WHICH, DUE TO CONSTRUCTION, CURRENTLY HAS THE APPEARANCE OF A PLACE THAT HAS BEEN UNDER HEAVY BOMBARDMENT FOR THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS.

3. FINALLY THE DAY ARRIVED AND THE SAUDI KING WAS PREPARED TO RECEIVE ME. HIS PEOPLE HAD BEEN VERY HOSPITABLE IN THE MEANTIME, AND THEIR PROTOCOL HAD COACHED ME CAREFULLY ABOUT THE CEREMONY ITSELF. I WOULD REVIEW THE HONOR GUARD AND MEET HIGH SAUDI OFFICIALS. THERE WOULD BE NO SPEECHES, SIMPLY A FEW WORDS TO PRESENT MY CREDENTIALS TO THE KING, HIS BRIEF ACCEPTANCE, AND THEREAFTER A PRIVATE CONVERSATION WITH HIM. NOBODY EXCEPT THE INTERPRETER WOULD BE IN THE ROOM, THEY SAID. IT WAS THEREFORE OF INTEREST TO ME THAT THE CROWN PRINCE, FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD AL-FAISAL, DR. PHARAON, FORMER AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON SOWAYEL AND THE KING'S MILITARY AIDE REMAINED IN THE ROOM AND DID NOT RPT NOT, UNLIKE MY DUTIFUL STAFF, LEAVE THE KING'S PRESENCE AS PLANNED, ALTHOUGH THESE PRINCES DID SEAT THEMSELVES RATHER REMOTELY FROM " THE KING AND I."

4. PRIOR TO BEING SEATED I MADE MY BRIEF REMARKS IN ARABIC, SAYING THAT I FELT PROUD TO PRESENT CREDENTIALS AS THE US AMBASSADOR TO THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA. I ASKED HIM TO ACCEPT MY CREDENTIALS AND TO ASSIST ME IN CARRYING OUT MY VERY IMPORTANT MISSION. HE MADE AN APPROPRIATE REPLY. SEATED, I SAID I WAS PLEASED TO BRING HIM THE WARM GREETINGS OF MY PRESIDENT. HE NODDED, SMILING APPRECIATIVELY, AND ASKED ABOUT THE PRESIDENT'S HEALTH, TO WHICH I REPLIED THAT DESPITE HIS HEAVY BURDENS THE PRESIDENT LOOKED FINE WHEN I LAST SAW HIM.

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5. KAHLID IBN ABD AL-AZIZ IS A TALL MAN, RUGGED, WHO RESEMBLES HIS FAMOUS FATHER MUCH MORE THAN DOES THE CROWN PRINCE. HIS FACIAL EXPRESSION WAS AMIABLE DURING OUR TALK AND HIS GAZE WAS DIRECT. HE WORE A BROWN CLOAK WHICH WAS MODESTLY TRIMMED, IN CONTRAST TO THE ELEGANT BLACK HEAVILY GOLD-TRIMMED GARMENTS OF THE COURTIER. HIS HANDS WERE LARGE AND TANNED, SEEMED MORE LIKE THOSE OF A MAN USED TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

THAN THOSE OF THE OTHERS. HE WAS ENTIRELY AT EASE DURING THE CONVERSATION AND DID NOT HESITATE TO BREAK INTO THE THOUGHTS OF THE OTHERS, INCLUDING THE CROWN PRINCE, AS THEY (DESPITE THEIR DISTANCE FROM US) EXPRESSED THEMSELVES, THOUGH I NOTICED HE DID NOT INTERRUPT HIS GUEST.

6. THE KING SAID HE UNDERSTOOD THAT I HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN IN THE KINGDOM. I RECALLED THAT I FIRST CAME HERE THIRTY-EIGHT-YEARS AGO, TO THE PROVINCE OF AL-HASA. WHERE GREAT THINGS WERE HAPPENING. THIS WAS THE ONLY ALLUSION I MADE TO MATTERS OF SUBSTANCE DURING THE CONVERSATION. THE KING SMILED AND SAID HE HOPED I WAS HAPPY TO RETURN. HE HAD BEEN TOLD, HE SAID, THAT I SLEPT IN THE DESERT EN ROUTE TO RIYADH. WHEN I CONFIRMED THAT WE DID, HE ASKED IF I USED A TENT. I SAID WE HAD NO TENT, HE LAUGHED AND SAID HE HOPED I HAD WARM CLOTHES AS THE DESERT IS VERY COLD THESE DAYS. I SAID I WAS WARM ENOUGH AND I PREFER TO DO WITHOUT A TENT IF POSSIBLE BECAUSE I LIKE TO SEE THE STARS. HE SEEMED TO LIKE THIS LIGHT CONVERSATION, BECAUSE HE KEPT IT GOING.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L FINAL SECTION OF 2 JIDDA 1320

7. THE KING THEN INQUIRED WHETHER THE MOON WAS NEAR THE BRIGHTEST STARS WHEN I WAS SLEEPING OUTSIDE THAT NIGHT. PERHAPS HE HAD THE PLANETS IN MIND. I REPLIED THAT IT WAS NOT, WHEREUPON HE TOLD ME THAT THE ARABS SAY THAT WHEN THE BRIGHT STARS AND THE MOON APPEAR CLOSE TOGETHER IT MEANS A "MARRIAGE," AND IF THAT HAPPENS ON THE NINTH OF THE MONTH IT WOULD BE THE COLDEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR. I EXPRESSED SURPRISE THAT IT WOULD NOT BE THE WARMEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR. HE

SEEMED AMUSED. FAHD BROKE IN TO SAY THAT SINCE WE HAD LANDED ON THE MOON AND FOUND IT BARREN AND ROCKY MANY ROMANTIC IDEAS OF YOUNG PEOPLE SEEMED LIKELY TO DISAPPEAR. KHALID TOOK THIS UP AND REMARKED THAT ARABIC POETRY IS FULL OF REFERENCES TO THE MOON AND LOVE AND THAT IN THE PAST A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN WAS OFTEN COMPARED TO THE MOON. I REMARKED THAT WHEN I WAS YOUNGER I HAD LEARNED TO DESCRIBE A PRETTY WOMAN AS BEING LIKE "THE MOON ON THE FOURTEENTH NIGHT." THIS EVOKED NODS AND SIGNS OF INTEREST.

8. THE INTERPLAY OF THOUGHT ON THIS CONGENIAL THOUGH NOT PROFOUND PLANE CONTINUED. PERHAPS THE CROWN PRINCE DECIDED THAT IF THIS WAS THE KIND OF CONVERSATION HE HAD STAYED FOR THEN HE'D MAKE HIS CONTRIBUTION. FAHD FELL SILENT, HOWEVER, WHEN I MENTIONED CASUALLY THAT I HAD VISITED TAIF AND FOUND THE CLIMATE THERE VERY AGREEABLE. I ADDED THAT I HOPED TO VIEW THE STARS FROM THERE ALSO SOME DAY. THE KING THEN EXTOLLED THE CLEAR AIR OF TAIF. I HEARD LATER FROM THE DCM THAT THE TOWN HAD BEEN SELECTED AS THE SITE OF THE

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NEW OBSERVATORY, AND THE ASSISTANT CHIEF OF PROTOCOL ALSO INFORMED ME THAT THE KING WOULD INDEED BE SPENDING FOUR MONTHS THERE THIS SUMMER. PERHAPS THE CROWN PRINCE, LIKE SOME MINISTERS, IS LESS ENAMORED OF THE PLACE THAN HIS KINGLY BROTHER.

9. THE KING ASKED ME TO DESCRIBE THE STARS I SAW (ORION AND SIRIUS, PRINCIPALLY), AND DR. PHARAON PROVIDED THEIR ARABIC NAMES. I THEN MOVED TO TAKE LEAVE OF MY GENIAL HOST. I ASKED HIM ONCE AGAIN TO HELP ME CARRY OUT MY MISSION AND SHOOK HANDS. HE SAID SOMETHING WHICH SOUNDED QUITE NICE IN TRANSLATION. I ALSO TOOK LEAVE OF THE CROWN PRINCE AND THE OTHERS AND DEPARTED MUSING ABOUT THE APPARENTLY SMALL EFFECT OF GREAT WEALTH ON THIS PARTICULAR BEDOUIN MONARCH.

10. THERE ARE THOSE WHO FEEL THAT THEY MUST MOVE IN QUICKLY AND HARD WHEN PROVIDED WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO "CLOSE THE DEAL" ON COST OVERRUNS, BOYCOTTS, VISAS AND PROJECTS. BUT THE SAUDIS ARE FAR FROM STUPID, AND SUCH PEOPLE WILL FIND THEMSELVES CONFINED TO THE TECHNOCRATS WHOSE FUNCTION IT IS TO COPE WITH THEM. THE NEED TO ENGAGE IN SMALL TALK AND TO AVOID BIG TALK AT FIRST SIGHT IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT IF ONE HOPES TO GET BACK IN THERE AGAIN. MOREOVER, THE NEED FOR ACCESS TO THE HIGHEST LEVELS IS INDISPENSABLE AS COMPANIES LIKE ARAMCO AND BECHTEL KNOW SO WELL. EVERY SENIOR US

GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL WOULD DO WELL TO SEEK OUT OUR COMPANIES WHO STAND HIGH IN SAUDI REGARD AND LEARN THE REASONS WHY. REMEMBER, IT WAS OUR BUSINESSMEN, NOT OUR OFFICIALS WHO FIRST CREATED THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE US ECONOMY THAT EXIST HERE TODAY.

11. THE FOLLOWING ARE NOTES ON HAPPENINGS WHILE WE WERE IN THE CEREMONIAL PROCESS:

A. WHILE WAITING FOR OUR AUDIENCE TO BEGIN, WE HEARD BRITISH AMBASSADOR (WHO HAD BEEN WAITING FOR 35 DAYS TO SAY GOODBYE TO KING) BEING SHARPLY ASKED BY TELEPHONE TO EXPLAIN WHY HE WAS IN JIDDA WHEN THE KING EXPECTED TO RECEIVE HIM IN RIYADH IN FORTY-FIVE MINUTES. THE RELATIVELY JUNIOR OFFICIAL WHO SPOKE TO HIM SAID:
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"MR. AMBASSADOR, WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN JIDDA WHEN YOU SHOULD BE IN RIYADH?" I RELATE THIS BECAUSE ROYAL PROTOCOL HERE IS SHOWING SIGNS OF CONSIDERABLE TENSION AS THEY PREPARE TO COPE WITH PRESIDENT SADAT AND HIS 150 FOLLOWERS DURING THE NEXT FIVE DAYS AND OUR OWN SUBSTANTIAL GROUP WHICH WILL ARRIVE HERE SHORTLY AFTERWARDS. IT WOULD BEHOOVE ALL AMERICAN VISITORS WHO ARE SEEKING APPROPRIATE CONTACT AT THE TOP TO TAKE IT EASY IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES SO AS TO ENSURE THE SUCCESS OF THEIR MISSION.

B. THE QUARTERS ASSIGNED TO ME AND MY STAFF, DESPITE THE PRESSURE WE HAVE MAINTAINED ON SAUDI OFFICIALS THESE PAST FEW DAYS, WERE EXCELLENT. MY BED WAS TEN FEET LONG, WIDER THAN THAT, AND HAD THREE SETS OF PILLOWS WHICH NO ONE ON MY STAFF COULD EXPLAIN IN ANY SATISFACTORY WAY. THE BATHROOM HAS JET-BLACK FACILITIES, WHICH ARE KNOWN TO OUR HIGHEST OFFICIALS, AND THE ONLY THING THAT NEEDS SPECIAL ATTENTION IS THE BIDET. THAT DEVICE WORKS ONLY TOO WELL. THE SAME ONE HAS CAUSED FITS OF TEMPER IN THE PAST BECAUSE IT SPOUTS EXTREMELY HOT WATER ERRATICALLY, WITH FORCE, AT THE WRONG PLACE AND AT THE WRONG TIME. AND, FOR THE INFORMATION OF THOSE WHO HOPE OTHERWISE BY THE TIME THEY FINISH READING THIS DESPATCH, I DID NOT GET CAUGHT BY THE BIDET DUE TO LONG EXPERIENCE, BUT IF THEY DO THEY WON'T SIT DOWN FOR A WHILE. PORTER END QUOTE
HORAN

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